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UNCLAS HARARE 001417

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION PRESIDENT BUSH'S VISIT TO AFRICA;
HARARE

11. Talks on Zimbabwe between President George W. Bush and his South African counterpart, Thabo Mbeki, continue to dominate editorials in the mainstream newspapers. Excerpts:

12. Under headline "Mbeki has his job cut out" the independent daily "The Daily News" (07/11) comments:

"By reassuring U. S. A. President George W. Bush and the whole world that Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU PF and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) parties are holding talks to find a solution to the country's deepening crisis, South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki has assumed a huge responsibility. . . We have no reason to doubt Mbeki's sincerity in this difficult task of trying to find a solution to Zimbabwe's problems. Neither do we have cause to believe what several other Zimbabweans have suggested, that Mbeki is a 'dishonest broker' and that he is in it merely to try and buy more time for his liberation war ally President Robert Mugabe and his embattled government. In fact, we would be the first to acknowledge that Mbeki is too intelligent a man not to see the futility of trying to shield a dictatorship in this Global Village. And more so, it should be clear to all concerned, Mbeki included, that the problems of Zimbabwe cannot be postponed any further. . . ."

13. Under headline "U. S. President visit exposes MDC deceit" the government-controlled daily "Chronicle" (07/11) comments:

"The visit to South Africa this week by American President George W. Bush was indeed a blessing in disguise for Zimbabwe. . . The U-turn by the U. S. President was infact a slap in the face for opposition Movement for Democratic Change leaders who looked forward to Mr. Bush exerting pressure on Mr. Mbeki to act on Harare. . . Mr. Bush, it appears, is beginning to see reason, probably because of the meeting with Mr. Mbeki, one of the regional leaders directly involved in efforts to finding solutions to the problems facing Zimbabwe. If Mr. Bush's sudden change of heart is a result of the fact that he now knows the truth about Zimbabwe, we want to believe his actions and utterances in the past were because of ignorance or misinformation. . . Now that Mr. Bush has confirmed for himself that some of his actions such as the unpopular 'smart sanctions' were based on half-baked truths, there is need to revisit his country's foreign policy on Zimbabwe. . . We salute Mr. Mbeki for remaining firm and resolute in defending Africa's independence, despite the threats and intimidation:

14. Under headline "Mbeki stands up to Bush. . . wins" the pro-government weekly "The Business Tribune" (07/10) comments:

"President George Bush's sojourn in South Africa was so subdued it was an anti-climax. . . What is encouraging about the Bush-Mbeki meeting is that Bush said afterwards now he supported Mbeki. Mbeki had a lot of detractors of his preferred 'quiet diplomacy' method and Bush was the most vociferous of them all. His change of stance therefore indicates that he sees the problem differently and is encouraging Mbeki to go the way he has always done. . . Africans ought to learn a lesson from Mbeki that Africa can stand up to American bully tactics if it remains forthright in its belief."

SULLIVAN